

Dan Ruben
Executive Director
Equal Justice America

August 30, 2013

I would like to thank you and Equal Justice America for its financial support this summer. My summer experience would not have been possible without the support from EJA.

I am happy to report that I had an excellent experience this summer as a Summer Law Clerk at California Rural Legal Assistance (“CRLA”) in Watsonville, California. CRLA is a statewide private non-profit law firm that provides free legal services to low income communities. The Watsonville office serves Santa Cruz and San Benito Counties in the areas of housing, public benefits, fair housing, public education, and employment. My summer work consisted of a combination of direct legal services, brief writing, and research.

In providing direct services, I had the opportunity to accompany and represent clients during administrative hearings. I assisted with client intake, case review, brief writing, research, and preparing client documents. I also had the opportunity to engage many clients in Spanish. Because of my background in education advocacy, I was able to take education intakes and develop the legal strategy and arguments for several cases. This is an area of law that I am passionate about.

My experience in administrative hearings dealt with employees who were dismissed for misconduct. I developed a legal strategy that would make the employees eligible for unemployment benefits by showing that their actions were not wanton or willful. I represented the clients in their hearings. The case revolved around four employees who were dismissed for taking unauthorized product from the company. The employer had a practice of giving away product once a week, yet employees were unable to distinguish whether product given away on those days was authorized. I found this experience insightful and valuable. I spent about seven (7) hours in back to back hearings because the cases involved the same parties and witnesses. For these clients, unemployment benefits will mean the difference between displacement and stability, since many of them were the primary wage earners for their household.

My writing and research focused on areas of law that didn’t have much case law, which made it challenging, yet rewarding. My research explored the rights of tenants who live in trailers and recreational vehicles on private property, and who engaged in “rent for work” agreements. I also provided research on the procedural safeguards that exist for people in drug and alcohol programs, specifically on what should happen if their treatment is terminated in circumstances where the client would be left homeless. I saw the value of this research while working on this case. Our client’s treatment was terminated because they were diagnosed with a medical condition that was under control.

Thank you again for the support you have offered me and other public interest law students.

Thanks,

Pedro Hernandez
UC Hastings College of the Law